

California Department of Veterans Affairs

NEWS FOR VETERANS

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From the Desk of Secretary Tom Johnson

Nine Months Report (sent to CDVA Staff the day before Veterans Day)

We were delighted this week to receive our letter of tentative approval for the GLAVC Veterans Homes project. This letter, coming from the State Homes Grant Program, of USDVA, essentially gives us the go ahead to start the real planning for the 3 homes in the Greater Los Angeles area and to bring the project forward to the CA Public Works Board. The additional delight of the letter is that they participated at a level significantly above the previous letter of participation due to the tremendous inflation being experienced in the construction industry. In other words, they went from a previous level of \$54 million to \$125.8 million which insures that we can go forward ultimately with all 5 homes because of the state funds that will also come into play. Needless to say, this was exciting.

We also started some cost savings projects and even some revenue enhancing projects this week. Our new housekeeping contract for the Sacramento headquarters building is in place and the Farm and Home program will now realize savings of about \$1,000 per day. On the revenue side, I appreciate the patience that some of you have had regarding our parking in downtown Sacramento but this will also be a big plus for the Farm and Home program as our Business Services office takes control of the parking revenues. Even the Governor's appointees are now paying for parking (that includes me!), so every one is being treated fairly and equally. At the end of the day we are trying to make the Farm and Home program operate more like a banking business and this will help insure that it will be here for generations of veterans to come.

The metrics and mission room is being readied for our displays. I saw the Legal Department display the other day and it is outstanding. What I will be looking for is a sense of who we are (the staff providing services to veterans), who we serve (our veterans and their families) and what measurements we have to see how we are doing. These measurements should be ones that can be up-dated quarterly so progress can be tracked. I'm excited to see this move forward.

Because of my long-standing interest in nursing, I have been asked by the Governor to be part of a team that looks at some solutions to our nursing education shortage in California. As a state, we only educate 55% of the nurses we need in California and the situation has remained static for 9 years. It is a combination of faculty, infrastructure, financing, retention/re-entry and innovations that will move us forward so it will be exciting to work on this project. Deputy Secretary Parente will also be on this team.

The Budget Process is moving forward but it has taken heroic efforts by John Hanretty and his thin budget crew to get

it done. We are short 3 people in this department (out of 5!), so our hat is off to those people and to the managers and staff who provided all the in-put. The 2006 budget year starts in just 7 months and it will be another tight year but we will keep working hard to give the best care and service with the resources provided. I'm mindful of the needs we have to be competitive in our salaries, modern with our equipment and progressive with our training and recognition programs and, believe me, we are working on all of those areas.

In closing, "Veteran" is an honored title that must be earned by military service in the armed forces of the United States. Men and women from all walks of life have given their time and even their life to protect our freedoms and to liberate enslaved people around the world. These are the veterans we serve daily and honor tomorrow.

Tom Johnson, Secretary

From Joyce Wessel Raezer, Director, Government Relations, National Military Family Association
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Deadline Approaches for Some Re-married Survivors to Apply for Benefits:

Time is running out for certain surviving spouses of deceased veterans to apply for re-instatement of VA survivor benefits. Last year, President Bush signed Public Law 108-183, the "Veterans Benefits Act of 2003," which restores entitlement to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and related home loan and education benefits for surviving spouses who remarry on or after their 57th birthdays. VA officials and military associations are concerned that surviving spouses may not be aware of this change in law, or may overlook this benefit if their subsequent marriages have not ended. Generally, VA pays DIC to the surviving spouses of military service members who die while on active duty, and to surviving spouses of veterans whose death resulted from service-related causes. The basic monthly rate for 2004 was \$967. It is increased if the surviving spouse has dependents, is housebound, or meets criteria common to those who need a home aide. There are additional payments for dependent children. Parents who were dependent upon the service member's income also may qualify for DIC.

Under previous law, surviving spouses who remarried were not eligible for DIC unless their marriages ended. At that time they could apply for reinstatement of benefits. Under the new law, surviving spouses who remarried after age 57 and before December 16, 2003, have only one year from the date the new law was enacted (December 16, 2003) to apply for restoration of benefits. If VA receives the application later than December 15, 2004, restoration of DIC must be denied. The one-year application period

does not apply to other surviving spouses whose remarriage on or after attaining age 57 followed enactment of the law. For more information on restoration of DIC, call VA's toll free number at 1-800-827-1000 or visit the nearest VA regional office. Office locations can be found in the blue pages of local telephone directories. More information is available at VA's Internet Web site, <<http://www.va.gov>>.

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